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From Sexual Selection to *Sex And The City*: the Biogeographies of the Blue Bird-Of-Paradise

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Abstract:

This paper takes as its starting point an encounter with a preserved blue bird-of-paradise skin. Though rare, the bird became wildly famous after it perched atop the head of Carrie Bradshaw during *Sex and the City: The Movie*. However, where in the movie the bird-skin acted as Carrie's *something blue*, I mobilize it in this article as a "telling example" of near-extinction. This is because the blue bird-of-paradise is but one of the millions of *Paradisaea* that were hunted, traded, shipped and lusted after since their earliest forms of commodification. And as the theory of sexual selection confirms, biographical entitlement cannot be assigned to a singular agent in the blue bird-of-paradise's story, which is why this article will chart its biogeographies: from New Guinea rainforests to New York streets. Here, instead tracing the blue bird-of-paradise's individual commodity biography, it becomes an act of tracing and placing the bird-skin within the life and death worlds of human-animal relations that produced, mobilized and maintain(ed) it as a commodity over time and space. In doing so the article makes two important contributions to the field of social history. Firstly, by conceptually focusing on the relations that produce lives, things and worlds it challenges the certainty that anchors the narration of biographies to the singular and anthropocentric embodiment of "a life." Secondly, mapping the biogeographies of a "lively" commodity, such as a preserved bird-of-paradise, offers the opportunity of highlighting the significant role so-called natural species and histories can play in shaping human histories.

Keywords:

birds-of-paradise, biography, biogeography, fashion, commodity, postcolonial.

Main Text of Article:

> When Malay, Polynesian, Portuguese, Dutch and English traders became fascinated with the rare birds, they were also merely dis-covering – making appear – objective effects of sexual selection accumulated over a few tens of thousands of years. No heroic entitlement can be conferred to anyone in this story: evolutionary creativity is absolutely without subject. [1]

Encountering the Blue Bird-of-Paradise

I was in New York on the hunt for birds-of-paradise. While their natural habitat is over nine thousand miles away in the rain forests of Papua New Guinea, I had it on good authority that I could find some particularly intriguing examples at famed Chelsea fashion emporium *New York Vintage* (NYV).[2] NYV's hand-selected permanent archive, which spans over a hundred and fifty years of fashion history, is the destination of choice for film and TV costume designers in search of that special something. The day I visited I was in pursuit of an extremely rare blue bird-of-paradise specimen. Though rare, the millinery specimen became wildly famous after it perched atop the head of Carrie Bradshaw during the ill-fated wedding scenes of *Sex and the City: The Movie*, acting as her "something blue".

To get a closer look at this curiously blue bird, I had booked an appointment with NYV conservator Carlos Benevides. Benevides specializes in the conservation of

millinery apparel and is an expert on the history and arts of the plumassier. The guild of the plummassiers gained its charter in Paris the 1500s and the profession encompasses the cleaning, bleaching, dying, curling and making up of plumes and feathers for fashion and interiors.[3] At the height of the "plume boom" (1900-1910), when the wings, heads and bodies of millions of birds were prepared for millinery adornment, plumassiers were a ubiquitous part of commercial districts in European and North American fashion capitals. Today plumassiers are considered a dying breed and Benevides is one of the few people living in North America to know, and still practice, the secrets of the craft.[4] I therefore arrived at my appointment excited to have an audience with a master of the craft and to encounter my quarry – the fabled blue bird-of-paradise.

Figure 1: The fabled blue bird-of-paradise next to two un-dyed examples of Greater Bird-of-Paradise skins in NYV's archive room. Image taken by the author.

Benivedes carefully unwrapped the blue bird-of-paradise from its tissue paper shroud whilst recounting the story of how he had come to acquire the bird. He had rescued the bird from being thrown on a bonfire after its owner had inherited it as part of an estate and was burning items they felt were problematic or of little importance. It was fitting that Benevides saved the bird from a fire, as the reason millinery bird-of-paradise specimens are so rare today, even though tens of thousands of them were shipped annually from New Guinea during the plume boom, is because milliners and plumassiers were ordered to burn their plumage stocks after the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. This act banned the trade in migratory and exotic bird parts and feathers across the U.S. in a bid to protect the many species being decimated due to the trade. Entire contents of millinery stockrooms were often confiscated and turned into feather bonfires by officials enforcing the act because it was difficult to tell which species the feathers came from. For example, Benevides revealed the blue bird-of-paradise was not an example of *Paradisaea rudolphi*, a bird-of-paradise species that has natural electric blue wing and flank plumes, rather, it was most likely either a Greater or Lesser Bird-of-paradise (*Paradisaea apoda, Paradisaea minor*) that had been dyed blue. When he laid the blue bird next to two Greater Bird-of-paradise specimens for comparison, I could see the dye was fading on the crest feathers to reveal the *Paradisaea apoda*'s golden yellow hue (see Figure 1). Although it may seem odd to dye these naturally vibrantly coloured feathers, plumassiers had to remain *au courant* with the changeable whims of the fashion industry. Bird-of-paradise feathers and parts, predominantly *Paradisaea apoda* or *minor* as their

plumes were the lightest colour and thus easiest to dye, were therefore dyed all the colours of the rainbow to suit changing tastes.

Dyed or not, on encountering bird-of-paradise skins the ethereal beauty and luxurious quality of their plumage is immediately felt, making it easy to comprehend why they have "for millennia been ornaments, commodities and gifts".[5] For as long as can be remembered Papuan tribes have used the exuberant plumes of the males to adorn themselves during ceremonies and war. And as early as 3000BC their plumes entered the luxury trade via the Moluccas, where they were particularly coveted for the headdresses of Moluccan Islamic sultanates.[6] Europeans, by comparison, were relatively late in discovering the seductive powers of the birds-of-paradise. The very first skins of birds-of-paradise were brought from New Guinea to Europe in 1522 by the surviving crew of the only ship to complete Magellan's circumnavigation of the globe. The five skins that returned with the Magellan crew ignited an enduring Euro-American fascination with birds-of-paradise as objects of aesthetic and corporeal desire: from muse to some of the greatest ornithologists to the most sought-after millinery material for the chicest Fashion Houses and, more recently, television's most famous fashionista. In reciting these geographies of consumption, circulation and display it is also not hard to imagine why the telling of commodity biographies has become an increasingly prominent activity among scholars, nor why this article intends to pursue the blue bird-of-paradise's biography.

However, and as will become apparent, the blue bird-of-paradise's individual life history is largely untraceable. Moreover, as the theory of sexual selection inform us

biographical entitlement cannot be assigned to a singular agent in the blue bird-of-paradise's story, which is why I will chart its biogeographies. In what follows, I develop biogeography as an alternative biographical practice where instead of tracing the blue bird-of-paradise's individual biography, I rather trace and place the millinery specimen within the life and death worlds of human-animal relations that mobilized it across time and space and states of life and death. By doing so the article seeks to make two important contributions to the field of social history. First, by conceptually focusing on the *situated* relations that produce lives, things and worlds it aims to not only extend the focus of biography and life history to nonhuman lives but also to further unsettle "the certainty that tethers the narration of "lives' to the singular and anthropocentric embodiment of 'a life'". [7] In doing so the article therefore more broadly seeks to rethink and recast what counts as "the social" and social lives in the practice of social history.[8] Second, mapping the boundary-crossing lives of millinery-preserved birds-of-paradise offers the opportunity of narrating collective natural *and* cultural change over time and space. This is because the blue bird-of-paradise can be thought of as a "telling example" of the millions of *Paradisaea* that were hunted, traded, shipped and lusted after since their earliest forms of commodification.

The article will proceed by firstly setting out the methodology of biogeography as a means by which to narrate the biographies of "lively commodities", understood here as forms of capital that derive their value from their status as living, or once living, animals. [9] The essay then moves to map the blue bird-of-paradise's collective commodity biogeographies: from New Guinea rainforests to New York Streets. To do so it firstly draws on Alfred Russel Wallace's descriptions of bird-of-paradise lifeworlds to account for how and why the *Paradisaea* were mobilized as lively

commodities. Here "lifeworld" is understood not as of the individual person or species but as multispecies, socio-material, earth-life entanglements, as biogeographies.[10] The following section then evidences how the liveliness of *Paradisaea apparel* paradoxically both brought the birds to the brink of extinction and eventually protected them against the deadening effects of commodification. The article concludes by figuring the blue bird-of-paradise as a telling example of near-extinction and outlining how biogeographical writing might contribute to the genus's resurgence.

Lively Commodity Biographies and the Biogeographical Alternative

The idea that commodities can be afforded a "life" or "career" offers a seductive methodology to explore the relational making of social, material and ecological worlds.[11] Indeed, the telling of commodity biographies has become an effective way of asserting and examining capitalism as a "world-ecology".[12] However, although this methodology has been taken-up widely across the social sciences and humanities, the geographers Gavin Bridge and Adrian Smith have identified there is much divergence "in what 'having a life' is understood to mean, and in the methods chosen for illustrating and analyzing these lives". [13] The apparently anthropomorphic conceit that things can have "lives" has, for example, been criticised by some for privileging the agency of objects to the detriment of actual living beings, and therefore for ignoring difference and social justice in the telling of commodity biographies. [14] In an economic era where people, animals and ecologies are all for sale, calls have therefore

been made to unpack and differentiate the categories of "life" involved in commodification. [15] This is a particularly pertinent task when considering the blue bird-of-paradise as it was once a living animal and, as will be explored, derives much of its value from this status. Thankfully a recent surge in studies focused on uncovering the geographies of what Donna Haraway terms "lively" commodities – forms of animal capital that derive their value from their status as living beings – has helped to recast the theoretical and epistemic underpinnings of commodity biographies.[16] For example, the commodity biographies of Asiatic lions, caterpillar fungus, and even the semen of Piedmontese bulls examine how, and importantly what, characteristics of life complicate capital accumulation and regimes of value.[17] These lively commodities not only challenge the traditional economic interpretation of commodities as "dead" cargo, but as we see with the example of Piedmontese bull semen, they also move beyond the idea of death as a caesura by understanding "liveness and deadness spatially and relationally, as bleeding the one into the other". [18] And as was clear from my own experience of encountering the blue bird-of-paradise its liveliness did not expire when the bird did. Although just a partly-preserved bird body, its glass-eye studded stuffed-head ensures it performs not only an individual bird's lived reality but the fanned display of its courtship feathers means that it also still harnesses, even after being dyed-blue, the captivating characteristics of the genus's plumes. Evolved in life, it was these characteristics that made bird-of-paradise skins such sought after commodities and imitation plumes pale into comparison: nothing not of the animal could be made to match the exceptional aesthetic qualities of their plumes. [19] Bird-of-paradise skins and plumes were therefore the most desired and most expensive avian commodities during the plume boom. Thus although dead, the blue bird-of-paradise must be understood as a lively

commodity in order to take into account how bird-of-paradise lifeworlds and the inextinguishable and inimitable animal agency of their skins and plumes contributed to their mobilization and maintenance as commodities across time and space and states of life and death. Following this understanding, the article extends Haraway's concept of the "lively" commodity to the preserved animal body and therefore also seeks to contribute to reinstating the missing "histories of animal agency" into histories of capitalism.[20]

However, as Garry Marvin has highlighted, the majority of preserved animal specimens "do not begin to have a recoverable history until their final fatal encounter with humans", which is why scholars have largely limited themselves to recovering their "afterlives".[21] This focus has had the unfortunate effect of not only largely limiting case studies to individual specimens that have acquired celebrity status in cultural institutions, but also of artificially separating the realms of life and death and nature and culture in the telling. To overcome the shortcomings of this approach I have been developing a biogeographical alternative. Biogeography traditionally refers to a sub-discipline of geography concerned with mapping patterns of the spatial distribution of species.[22] The term has, however, been recently reworked by a range of geographers interested in rethinking the relation between the *bio* and the *geo* and of renewing the place of life in "its multiplicity of human and nonhuman forms, processes, and connectivities".[23] In my own work, the term offers an alternative biographical practice – one that shifts attention away from charting the life history of individual agents to instead focusing on the relations that produce lives, things and worlds – and titles a series of collaborative works exploring the lively geographies of natural history specimens.[24] Here, instead of repeating the anthropocentrically

inflected and linear process of tracing a specimen's biography (which often connotes tracing the individual specimen's career within the museum and thus a focus on telling stories about the people who collected them or the institutions that encased them),[25] it becomes an act of tracing and placing the specimen within the life and death worlds of human-animal relations that produced, mobilized and maintain(ed) it over time and space. To narrate the biogeography of an animal specimen it is therefore not simply about paying greater sensitivity to the spaces of "a life", but, and to push further, it is rather attendant on the fact that these spaces, or "lifeworlds", are themselves in life. Here "lifeworld" is understood not as of the individual person or species but as multispecies, socio-material, earth-life entanglements, as biogeographies.[26] Moreover it also recognises that within these lifeworlds "always asymmetrical living and dying and nurturing and killing" takes place. [27]

A biogeographical approach is therefore particularly suited to narrating the blue bird-of-paradise's commodity biography, as only it can fully acknowledge and attend to its status as a lively commodity, and thus explore how liveliness has been constitutive of the relations that have mobilized the blue bird-of-paradise as a commodity across time and space, states of life and death and spaces of nature and culture. Following this approach, rather than it being cast as dead cargo entering dead worlds of culture, the blue bird-of-paradise is of and in relation to the biogeographies – earth-life entanglements – that produced, mobilized and maintain it as a lively commodity. Accordingly, I turn to Actor-Network Theory and adopt its entree into the "biography" of a commodity, where life is not attributable to a singular agent or order but is rather understood as a set of relations.[28] However ANT's geometric habits – mapping life as a set of "networked" relations – have also been critiqued for

flattening difference and for missing what the geographer Sarah Whatmore calls the "lively commotion of the world".[29] In her writing Whatmore promotes an alternative spatial imaginary to ANT drawing on the biophilosophical writings of Deleuze and Guattari, the decentring concerns of multi-species studies and feminist concerns with corporeality to explore the intersection of the lives of commodities with "lived" bodies and spaces.[30] I draw on her "biogeographical" approach in this article in order to attend to the more-than-human lively presences, processes and geographies involved in the blue bird-of-paradise's commodity biography.

However, there is still the methodological difficulty of tracing this mobilization in full to contend with. In my experience bird-skins rarely have accompanying archival documentation that would enable one to follow, in any detail at least, a single millinery bird-of-paradise's afterlife, never mind its boundary-crossing biogeographies. And this is certainly the case with the blue bird-of-paradise, which aside from the avian evidence provided by the skin itself, and Benevides's recounting of how he had come to acquire the bird, it had no additional documentation to assist in tracing its mobilization from New Guinea to New York. Finding "continuous documentation" that allows one to follow lives as they cross bio-geographic and life and death boundaries has also presented a challenge for social historians in this journal.[31] Lara Putnam explains that for the social historian the "telling example" has become a useful evidentiary paradigm in cases of archival absence, where "simply finding one or more instance of *presence* is something to write home about".[32] Therefore although the blue bird-of-paradise's individual life history is largely untraceable I would like to argue can be thought of as a "telling example" of the millions of *Paradisaea* that were hunted, traded, shipped and lusted after since their

earliest forms of commodification. The genus *Paradisaea* consists of seven species of birds-of-paradise, including the Greater and Lesser bird-of-paradise.[33] The genus is found on the island of New Guinea as well as the nearby islands groups of the Aru Islands, D'Entrecasteaux Islands and West Papua Islands, island-habitats were hunted almost to the point of extermination during the plume boom. Mapping the boundary-crossing lives of millinery-preserved *Paradisaea* therefore offers the opportunity of narrating collective natural *and* cultural change over time and space. Distinctions often drawn between natural and cultural history therefore seem beside the point when the starting ground of a biogeographical investigation is that relations between human and nonhuman worlds are inextricably entwined.

All this said, what is not beside the point is the issue of postcoloniality. For example, most of the archival materials that map the commodity biogeographies of preserved birds-of-paradise skins are euro-centric in origin, and one cannot escape that the birds' mobilization as commodities was largely produced and sustained by colonizing and imperial histories.[34] Furthermore, the common effect of these histories is to obscure or erase prior histories, which as the anthropologist Stuart Kirsch acknowledges is certainly the case with the *Paradisaea*. He outlines that although their significance for exchange was well established long before European intervention, very little remains to document the pre-colonial trade routes and social relations between New Guinea and South-East Asia and Northern Australia.[35] Thus when Magellan's ship reached what would become derogatively termed "Melanesia" in 1521, the birds-of-paradise not only became ensnared in a global colonial commodity chain but also became commandeered by European imperial imaginaries.[36]

This is most intensely exemplified through the emergence of the *apoda* myth. With the introduction of five trade-skins from the Magellan voyage to Europe, the birds-of-paradise became a focus of intense scientific curiosity and study. The extraordinary beauty and rich colour of the bird's plumes meant that trade-skins were highly sought after by European cabinet collectors. According to Pierre Belon's *Natural History of Birds*, by the end of the 1540's birds-of-paradise skins were "a common sight in the cabinets of Europe and Turkey".[37] Collectors were particularly captivated by their unusual anatomy, as indigenous hunters had removed the legs during their preparation as trade-skins. This gave rise to the European speculation that the birds did not have feet and instead spent their lives perpetually in flight, living off dew and never touching the earth till death. The mysteries of their lifestyle were suggested in a set of descriptions and illustrations produced by Ulisse Aldrovandi for his encyclopaedia *Ornithologiae* published in 1599 (see Figure 2).[38] Considered one of the most respected naturalists of the period, Aldrovandi's illustrated natural history for the birds-of-paradise substantiated the idea that they only lived on sky dew and sunrays and never landed even when breeding (the female apparently laying her eggs in a special cavity on the males back). Although some complete skins arrived in Europe from the early 1600s, refuting Aldrovandi and his peer's ideas, in 1758 Linnaeus knowingly perpetuated the myth by naming the Greater bird-of-paradise (the largest of the genus) Paradisaea *apoda*, the "legless bird-of-paradise".

Figure 2: An illustration of a "Bird of Paradise" from Ulisse Aldrovandi, Ornithologiae hoc est de Avibus Historiae Libri XII, (Bologna, 1599), p. 813.

The *apoda* story highlights how imperial geographic imaginaries can work to, if not completely erase, then at least misinterpret indigenous knowledges and labours. Indeed, it is a striking example of how easily Europeans were mislead as a result of the agency of indigenous hunters, and therefore it also works to complicate simplistic postcolonial interpretations that present Europeans as in control of all aspects of colonial encounters. Thus, although I will start this biogeographical exploration of the

bird's commodification and mobilisation with Alfred Russel Wallace's (1823-1913) encounter with the birds in 1854, his first-hand descriptions of what would be later termed "sexual selection" were, as he himself readily admits, wholly reliant on indigenous knowledge and hunting expertise. This said, although I intend to tell of the lifeworlds of these hunters, and those of the non-indigenous plume hunters, what is really at stake are those of the birds, which is why a biogeographical approach is required. From the starting point that human and nonhuman lifeworlds are inextricably entangled, rather than being passive agents in a human-centred narrative, the *Paradisaea* are figured as active agents in their mobilizations across time and space and states of life and death, and human narrators are obliged to remain alert to the ways in which our histories collectively shape, and are shaped by nonhuman existences. This goes beyond the mere attribution of agency to an animal-object, rather it pays serious attention to the ways in which histories and geographies are co-produced by, and indeed co-produce, more-than-human subjects and socio-material worlds. In what follows I will therefore attempt to map the *Paradisaea's* commodity biogeographies: from New Guinea rainforests to New York Streets, or, rather, from sexual selection to *Sex and the City*.

Preserving Paradise

Inspired by Arjun Appaduri's call to "follow the things themselves", most commodity biographies trace the three-stage career trajectory of a particular commodity from emergence, through use-life, to "death" or re-use.[39] However, while this approach has helped to highlight how commodities are actively involved in the

production of social relations and histories through their making, circulation and use, what this often linear and anthropocentric approach misses is a sense of the more-than-human lively presences, processes and geographies involved.[40] In order to trace the emergence of the *Paradisaea* as commodities, and to understand why liveliness matters in their commodity story, it requires drawing on a biogeographical conceptualisation of the social that incorporates the social relations, ecologies and lived bodies of the birds themselves.[41] As Alfred Russel Wallace was the first European naturalist to witness and describe the birds-of-paradise's entangled lifeworlds, and to document the exchange and trade of their skins, his writings offer a unique insight into how and why the *Paradisaea* were mobilized as lively commodities. In 1854 Wallace (1823-1913) ventured into the Malay Archipelago of South-East Asia in search of natural history specimens including the coveted birds-of-paradise. He emerged eight years later with 125,660 specimens (mostly birds and insects) including several bird-of-paradise skins and a list of eighteen described species. Wallace presents an autobiographical account of his collecting trip in *The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-utang and the Bird of Paradise* (1869).[42] In the book as well as presenting descriptions of the "lekking" behaviour of the Greater bird-of-paradise, he carefully repudiates the mythology and misinterpretations that had arisen in Europe around them since the earliest known trade-skins had returned with Magellan's ship, confirming they do indeed have legs.[43] Wallace underlines that it was no small wonder that very little correct information was known about the birds as even the Malay traders were working from the skins alone: their name for the birds - "Burong coati", or "dead birds" - indicating that they never saw them alive.[44] Yet as Wallace's account makes very clear it was "personal [and

prolongued] acquaintance" with the living birds that would lead to true appreciation of their lifeworlds. [45]

To gain personal acquaintance with the birds Wallace was wholly dependent on indigenous knowledge and skilled labour. He had brought two Malay "boys" from Dobbo (the Malay trading port) "whose sole business was to shoot and skin birds", while he attended to natural historical enquiry during his "walks in the forest".[46] However, to access and negotiate the interior forests and thus encounter the birds-of-paradise, Wallace also had to earn the trust of the Papuan peoples who lived alongside the birds and knew their rhythms and routines of life. Although Wallace demonstrated a "more sincere curiosity in other human cultures" than many of his contemporary evolutionists, as a nineteenth-century natural historian he still used prejudicial language to describe their appearance and ways of life.[47] Yet as Wallace rightly acknowledges, it was through his Papuan guides' expertise in forest-craft that he got unparalleled access to the bird's display trees, enabling him to observe them first hand and to publish the first scientific description of the courtship – "lekking" - behaviour of the Greater bird-of-paradise in *The Annals and Magazine of Natural History* in 1857:

> They are in a state of excitement and incessant activity, and the males assemble together to exercise, dress and display their magnificent plumage. For this purpose they prefer certain lofty, large-leafed forest-trees (which at this time have no fruit), and on these, early in the morning from ten to twenty full-plumaged birds assemble, as the natives express it, "to play and dance". They open their wings, stretch out their necks, shake their bodies, and keep the

> long golden plumes open and vibrating – constantly changing their positions, flying across and across each other from branch to branch, and appearing proud of their activity and beauty… while the pale yellow head, swelling throat or rich metallic green, and bright golden eye, give vivacity and life to the whole figure. [48]

Wallace's description of the Greater bird-of-paradise's courtship display helped to substantiate Darwin's theory of sexual selection, and is still cited as the "telling example" of runaway sexual selection. [49] However, what the passage also hints at is that the "play and dance" of the birds was not merely studied but was also performed by the humans who lived alongside the birds. Kirsch describes how the males of the Yonggom tribe, who he speculates may have also been Wallace's forest guides, take part in a dance performance, which they call *yok*, where they wear headdresses that feature plumes from the Greater bird-of-paradise and mimic the lively display of the birds. Like the male birds that congregate in display trees, Kirsch explains that the dancers seek to attract the attentions of eligible females in the tribe who have come to view their performance: "In both contexts, the sublime beauty of the plumes and the rhythmic nature of the dance contribute to the desired effect of seduction." [50] The Yonggom's understanding and embodiment of the birds' behaviour underlines the ways in which Papuans were preserving and wearing the feathers precisely to harness their lively effects. Although Kirsch is unclear on how long the Yonggom have practised this ritual, Papuan peoples have been recorded wearing bird-of-paradise plumes as performative symbols of fertility and invulnerability since at least the sixthteenth century. [51] However, the presence of the feathered headdresses on Dong Son drums, which have been found on the islands of Sangeang, Salayar, Alor, Rote,

central, southeast, and southwest Maluku, and northwest Papua and date from the late third to the fifth centuries CE, suggests that these practices have a much longer and complex history than western scholarship is able to fully acknowledge. What these traces do start to acknowledge is the powerful influence birds-of-paradise have had on Papuan social histories and their interaction and exchange with other Island societies. They therefore also indicate how the Papuan practice of wearing the bird-skins set up the conditions, however inadvertently, for developing the *Paradisaea* into lively commodities. Firstly, by wearing the plumes Papuan peoples advertised their vivacity to Malay traders, who began to collect the skins as "tribute" for their sultans who coveted the exuberant plumes for their own headdresses. Secondly, by preserving the skins they made the plumes mobile and therefore available not only to local practices of tribute and exchange but also to regional and global networks of commerce. Although there is little evidence to document the extent of pre-colonial trade networks in birds-of-paradise skins, the skins are listed as tributary gifts and trade items in Chinese sources from the Tang, Song and Ming eras, and Portuguese sources mention the feathers being traded in Persia and the Ottoman empire in around 1500. [52] Then in 1772 it was reported that Dutch trading networks were supplying bird-of-paradise skins to the wealthy in Persia, Surat, and the East Indies. [53] However, while Papuans, by advertising their lively effects, were certainly instigators in the bird's commodification, as I will now argue it was the birds' biogeographic attributes that also ensured their mobilization and maintenance as lively commodities beyond Eastern markets.

Wallace confirms that by the time of his arrival on the Malay Peninsula the *Paradisaea* were very much "an article of commerce", which was to his benefit as he

needed to procure skin specimens to describe them for science. [54] Wallace was able to accompany Papuan hunters into the interior forests to witness how the birds were being harvested and preserved and therefore mobilized as commodities. Wallace's descriptions of these hunting trips underscore how he was again dependant on indigenous knowledge and practices. Figure 3 illustrates the indigenous hunters would first to construct a hide, where apparently the covering had to be "very close" otherwise the bird would "quit the tree, and never return to it". [55] The hunters would then ascend to this hide before daylight and wait with their bow and a good stock of arrows till the birds started congregating. Although the illustration depicts the hunters using rounded arrows – which were preferred because they made no wound that could spoil the plumage – according to Wallace the bird was usually "so strong and tenacious of life" that pointed arrows were usually required.[56] And as Wallace's descriptions of indigenous skin-preservation techniques will now illustrate, something of the birds' liveliness endured even after the event of death.

Figure 3: Alfred R. Wallace, The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-utan and the Bird of Paradise, a Narrative of Travel, with Studies of Man and Natural History, (London, 1869), p. 126.

The main goal of indigenous preservation was to preserve the vibrancy of the birds' courtship feathers to affect their powers of seduction and invulnerability during ceremonies. The indigenous mode of preservation was to skin the body up to the beak, which they then stuffed and wrapped with leaves and placed to dry in a smoky hut. According to Wallace, some of these skins were in a good condition and often had wings and feet left on; while others were "dreadfully stained with smoke", and all had the "most erroneous idea of the proportions of the living bird" thanks to shrinkage of the skin. [57] Therefore, although it could be argued the bird's liveliness was very

much diminished through these processes of preservation, Wallace also qualified that the skin and plumage of these birds was "so firm and strong", that they bore "washing and cleaning better than almost any other sort".[58] It is my contention that the enduring exuberance and performative power of the birds' plumage, in the spite of the event of death and processes of preservation, was generative of the relations that mobilized the skins as "lively" commodities. And, as Arun Saldanha argues biographical entitlement cannot be attributed to any one agent in this commodity story as when Papuan warriors and dancers began wearing bird-of-paradise skins they were really mobilizing the "objective effects of sexual selection" that produced, and continue to produce, the genus *Paradisaea's* sought-after plumes.[59] Sexual selection refers to the process through which biological traits and characteristics evolve to aid copulation, which is why for Brian Massumi it "expresses an inventive animal exuberance attaching to qualities of life, with no direct use value or survival value".[60] And it was thanks to New Guinea's unique biogeography – "isolated tropical highlands, plentiful vegetation, few mammal, competitors and virtually no predators" – that the birds-of-paradise were able to evolve, through the process biologists call "runaway sexual selection", arguably the most fanciful and exuberant plumage in all of the animal kingdom. [61]

However, unfortunately for the birds their exceptional "animal exuberance" in life directly shaped the *Paradisaea's* value as commodities. Moreover, this animal agency did not fully expire when the birds did; rather it remained attached to the bird-skins and in turn encouraged attachments. This process began as a performative embodiment of liveliness through the wearing of their plumes, but by the time of Wallace's expedition it was clear their liveliness had affected their attachment to not

only regional but to global colonial commodity networks. For example, when reflecting on his inability to purchase skins of the rarer birds-of-paradise species, Wallace suggests that the gift economy of tribute had made even these scarce species available to global markets as the Sultan of Tidore was passing on these unwanted skins to Dutch officials. [62] The Dutch officials were then forwarding them, via the now well-established trade networks of the Dutch East India Company, to Asian and European markets.[63] These observations begin to suggest the impact the trade was having on living populations of bird-of-paradise species and Wallace's account highlights the Papuan peoples growing unease about European interest and intervention in the trade: "… they have besides a vague and very natural dread of some ulterior object in a white man's coming at so much trouble and expense to their country only to get Birds of Paradise."[64] And as the next section shall show, they were right to dread the presence of the "white man" and to question his motivations for acquiring plumes.

Paradisaea Apparel

New Guinea has been characterised as "the land time forgot", however the trade in birds-of-paradise skins roundly refutes this as it highlights New Guinea's early connectedness not only to regional exchange networks but also to global trade networks and centres. [65] As the previous section argued, it was the *Paradisaea's* exceptional exuberance, even after the event of death, that affected this connectedness. And as this section shall demonstrate liveliness was a key aspect of the *Paradisaea's* appeal to Western consumers, paradoxically mobilizing the relations

that both brought the birds to the brink of extinction and eventually protected them against the deadening effects of the plumage trade. During the "plume boom" (1880-1920) the business of killing birds for the millinery trade was practiced on a global scale. It involved the deaths of hundreds of millions of birds in many parts of the world. [66] Often the wings, heads and entire bodies of birds were used to adorn hats. London was the imperial centre of the trade in exotic feathers, whilst most the manufacturing took place in Paris or New York.[67] Birds of all kinds were consumed for both their feather and bodily appearance; however, bird-of-paradise plumes were particularly coveted for their sumptuous quality and exuberant colours. It is at this point of consumption that object-biographies and animal-afterlives customarily begin. However, although these approaches attribute agency to animal-objects the narrative still tends to be human-centric. By comparison my biogeographical approach can account for the non-human forces that mobilized the *Paradisaea's* journey to Western consumer spaces whilst ensuring they remained attached to New Guinea's rainforests. For, as the following example serves to demonstrate, it was the exceptional aesthetic qualities of the *Paradisaea*, qualities that had arisen through runaway sexual selection, which afforded them an afterlife in European fashion.

The *What Women Are Wearing* section of the New York Times dated September 25, 1904 indicates how women were wearing *Paradisaea apparel*:

> Mrs John Jacob Astor is wearing a chic purple crinoline hat with a small, flat, round crown and a wide brim… Its sole trimming is a black bird of paradise plume that starts from the left of the crown and sweeps upward, outward, and backward against both brim and crown.

> Mrs Clarence Mackay wears hats to match her frocks, the hats being made to go with each costume. The other evening she had on at dinner at Sherry's a charmingly light but large round hat of pearly grey white tulle shirred on invisible wires and quite transparent as to the wide brim. From the front and left of the hat floated a plume of white bird of paradise feathers.

While it could be argued that Mrs Astor and Mrs Mackay are blindly following the dictates of fashion, such a reading would belittle their aesthetic intelligence and the birds' enduring powers of seduction. The descriptions of these women's ensembles suggest that both they and their admirer valued the bird-of-paradise plumes for their bodily effects. They were not simply wearing a dead bird on their head or representing "exotic tropicality", [68] rather, they were harnessing performatively the bird's ethereal beauty and effervescent movement. Kirsch has described the practice of Western women mobilizing birds-of-paradise plumes as a "reverse anthropology" of the male Yonggom dance performances, demonstrating that although separated along geographical, cultural and gender lines they were connected through their mutual appreciation for the exceptional brilliance of the birds' plumes.[69] However while the Western practice of dying feathers, particularly black, might seem to refute this, these women understood that when worn these bird-skins took on a performative liveliness. An 1875 edition of Harper's Bazaar detailing how birds-of-paradise were being attached to hats confirms that performativity was part of the *Paradisaea's* appeal as apparel: "The entire bird is used, and is mounted on wires and springs that permit the head and wings to be moved about in the most natural manner."[70] Although western consumers were clearly unaware of the natural histories of these birds, and therefore the intended function of their feathers, they at least recognised that when moving these feathers took on an added allure. Western consumers of *Paradisaea*

apparel were therefore also attempting to mobilize and embody the bird-skin's lively effects.

However, the corollary of the growing accessibility of birds-of-paradise plumes in Western markets was the deadening effects the trade was having on living populations of birds-of-paradise. In his 1913 book *Our Vanishing Wildlife* W. T. Hornaday wrote of the situation:

> Nothing but the legal closing of the world's markets against their plumes and skins can save [the birds-of-paradise]. … Take the great bird of paradise (*Paradisaea apoda*) as an illustration. On Oct. 2, 1912, at Indianapolis, Indiana, in three show-windows within 100 feet of the headquarters of the Fourth National Conservation Congress, I counted 11 stuffed heads and 11 complete sets of plumes of this bird, displayed for sale. The prices ranged from $30 to $47.50 each! [71]

Hornaday's description of the 11 heads and skins pinned to a board offers a stark contrast to the descriptions of Mrs. Astor and Mrs. Mackay's mobilizations of the *Paradisaea*'s avian exuberance, and instead puts us in touch with the "dead world(s)" of the plumage trade: its acts of killing and economic cargoes of feathery remains. Therefore, while liveliness certainly helped to coconstruct the encounter value of *Paradisaea apparel* it also masked the necro-geographies of capitalist accumulation that enabled these Western consumer encounters (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Birds-of-paradise and other plumes for sale on a millinery board and display box. Courtesy National Conservation Training Center Archives/Museum.

At the height of "feather fashions" in the UK (1901-1910), 14,362,000 pounds of exotic feathers were imported into the United Kingdom at a total valuation of £19, 923, 000.[72] To underline the scale of the trade, Hornaday compiled a table detailing the number of exotic feathers and skins being sold in 1911 at four of London's busiest commercial sales rooms (see Table 1). The total number of bird-of-paradise skins auctioned during these sales was 20,698. It is worth underlining that, according to Hornaday, these three sales only represented six months and that very nearly double this quantity was sold by these four firms annually. Sales did not vary much from year to year either, and, in the following year, 24,579 birds-of-paradise were sold by the same four firms over the same period. While these sales give a good indication of the annual sales of London feather merchants, it is worth pointing out that not all skins were brought to the London market. Very large shipments were also made direct to the raw-feather dealers in Amsterdam, Paris and New York.

LONDON FEATHER SALE OF FEBRUARY, 1911					
Sold by Hale & Sons			*Sold by Dalton & Young*		
Aigrettes	3,069	ounces	Aigrettes	1,606	ounces
Herons	960	”	Herons	250	”
Birds of Paradise	1,920	skins	Paradise	4,330	bodies
Sold by Figgis & Co.			*Sold by Lewis & Peat*		
Aigrettes	421	ounces	Aigrettes	1,250	ounces
Herons	103	”	Paradise	362	skins
Paradise	414	skins	Eagles	384	”
Eagles	2,600	”	Trogons	206	”
Condors	1,580	”	Hummingbirds	24,800	”
Bustards	2,400	”			
LONDON FEATHER SALE OF MAY, 1911					
Sold by Hale & Sons			*Sold by Dalton & Young*		
Aigrettes	1,390	ounces	Aigrettes	2,921	ounces
Herons	178	”	Herons	254	”
Paradise	1,686	skins	Paradise	5,303	skins
Red Ibis	868	”	Golden Pheasants	1,000	”
Junglecocks	1,550	”			
Parrots	1,700	”			
Herons	500	”			
Sold by Figgis & Co.			*Sold by Lewis & Peat*		
Aigrettes	201	ounces	Aigrettes	590	ounces
Herons	248	”	Herons	190	”
Paradise	546	skins	Paradise	60	skins
Falcons, Hawks	1,500	”	Trogons	348	”
			Hummingbirds	6,250	”
LONDON FEATHER SALE OF OCTOBER, 1911					
Sold by Hale & Sons			*Sold by Dalton & Young*		
Aigrettes	1,020	ounces	Aigrettes	5,879	ounces
Paradise	2,209	skins	Heron	1,608	”
Hummingbirds	10,040	”	Paradise	2,850	skins
Bustard	28,000	quills	Condors	1,500	”
			Eagles	1,900	”
Sold by Figgis & Co.			*Sold by Lewis & Peat*		
Aigrettes	1,501	ounces	Aigrettes	1,680	ounces
Herons	140	”	Herons	400	”
Paradise	318	skins	Birds of Paradise	700	skins

Table 1: reproduced from William T. Hornaday, *Our Vanishing Wildlife,* (New York, 1913), p. 121.

Bird-of-paradise plumes also commanded the highest prices in the London auctions. This was partly due to their rarity when compared to other varieties of bird and partly due to the cost of shipping them via China, where the skins were preserved, from

remote New Guinea. Moreover, although attempts were made by plumassiers to imitate the feathers, using both unnatural materials and the feathers of more common bird-species, nothing could be made to match their exceptional aesthetic qualities and only the real skins would do. The economic rewards to be had in harvesting bird-of-paradise plumes therefore inspired Dutch, Chinese and Australian traders to seek their fortunes in New Guinea's rain forests, one of the most lucrative hunting grounds during the international plume boom. An article on "The Trade in Birds of Paradise" written by Mr. W. Emery Stark in *The Times of Ceylon* in 1911 gives an indication of the scale and organisation of the enterprise:

> The traders are chiefly Chinese, but there are two Dutch trading companies. The Government issue licences for hunting at 25 guilders, or about 2*l*. a gun, and, in addition, the Government charge a heavy export duty on the birds. This year there were 4000 applications for licenses of which 1870 were granted, and one trading company alone secured 240 licences. The traders engage the natives as "hunters", paying the licence and finding guns and ammunition. Each "hunter" is expected to bring in for the season 20 skins of the "great bird of paradise" and 50 to 60 of the ordinary and less valuable sort. … A rough calculation of the 1870 licences issued this year, show that they are likely to result in the production of about 200,000 skins. [73]

This article confirms that Papuan hunters and Malay traders were right to fear European intervention in the trade. Dutch colonialism had not only rerouted the Papuan and Malay exchange economies in birds-of-paradise skins into a one-way capitalist supply-chain from New Guinea rain forests to Euro-American fashion markets, it had also significantly scaled-up the killing enterprise. According to Corey Ross "the introduction of guns from 1870s and the establishment of a regular

steamship connection in the 1890… significantly boosted exports to London, Amsterdam and Paris".[74] Ross also estimates that 30,000-80,000 skins were exported annually from the Dutch half of the island at the height of the boom. However, both Hornaday's and the above calculations suggest this may be a conservative estimate.

We know from Wallace's accounts that prior to Dutch intervention the Aru islanders had been hunting relatively sustainably: using hides, hunting with arrows and only killing mature birds. However, Robert Cribb's research confirms that during the boom Papuans were largely using firearms to kill the birds[75] The Papuan hunters were hiring firearms from the Malay hunters and traders, who in turn were provided with hunting equipment from the Dutch and Chinese trading companies. These violent interactions underline the destructive impact colonialism was having not only on bird-of-paradise lifeworlds, but also their relations with indigenous humans. Where once Papuans would have spared immature birds, as they only wanted mature skins for their headdresses, they were now actively contributing to their extermination. Cribb, however, points out that Dutch naturalists had urged the government in Batavia to enact a form of governance to protect the slaughter of birds-of-paradise as early as the mid-1890s, in an act of what Richard Grove calls "green imperialism". [76] Their status as the "telling example" of runaway sexual selection mobilized ornithologists and activists in imperial centres to argue against extinction and for protectionism. For example, in the journal *Nature* in 1895, Margaretta L. Lemon, Hon. Secretary of the Society for the Protection of Birds (SPB), appealed to the British and Dutch governments to follow the "good example" of the German government and enforce "strict regulations" to preserve this "wonder of nature".[77] However, as there was a great deal of scientific uncertainty about whether, and which,

birds-of-paradise were threatened with extinction, very little progress was made in terms of implementing protection measures. As Cribb asserts, "more than 10 years [1897-1907] of deliberation on the life and death of the birds of paradise" came to nothing.[78] Moreover, while the British instituted a ban on commercial hunting in British New Guinea in 1909, Cribb evidences the legislation was ineffectual as it contained many loopholes, making it difficult to enforce.[79]

This ban is, however, indicative of the pressure that was being placed on colonial administrations and their metropolitan governments by scientists and conservationists. Saving the brilliant birds-of-paradise had become the cause célèbre of SPB and the Audubon Society, societies that had both been formed to counter the exterminism of the plumage trade. Furthermore, when the Dutch East Indies Society for Nature Conservation was founded in 1912, it adopted the "Bird of Paradise" as its logo. This groundswell of activism can again be explained by the birds' enduring liveliness and underlines why a biogeographical approach is needed. For just as the women wearing their plumes were mobilizing the *Paradisaea*'s lively effects, this exuberance, as an indicator of evolutionary creativity and thus the expressiveness of life itself, served as a rallying point for both scientists and conservationists. For example, at the 1914 Annual Meeting of the now *Royal* Society for the Protection of Birds its members expressed their support of "drastic legislation and international action" by citing the exceptional aesthetic appeal of the birds-of-paradise:

> Some architect in future ages may be able to build something worthy of his century when all buildings and monuments of beauty have been destroyed by

> our municipalities, but it will be beyond the wit of man to replace Birds of Paradise… by more exquisite fauna. [80]

Traditional object biographies would likely attribute this conservation response to human action and understanding. However the approach taken here seeks to emphasise that even in death the *Paradisaea's* exceptionally exuberant and inimitable plumes were at least in part generative of the relations and attachments that mobilized the birds as commodities *and* conservationist cause célèbres. Moreover it is able to highlight how even in their supposedly "dead" commodity forms the birds remained connected to the rainforests of New Guinea. However, Cribb points out that although conservationist arguments were marked by a "strong sense of urgency" progress in terms of on-the-ground protection was still slow.[81] The Germans had instituted a blanket ban on the trade of Bird-of-paradise skins on their half of New Guinea in 1913 following the U.S. ban on the import of feathers in 1912. However, after a hunting hiatus due to slaughter of another kind – World War One – the enterprise took on a renewed vigour and the Dutch did not impose similar prohibitions on hunting until 1922, a year after the British had eventually passed their Plumage Act. For Cribb the timings of these interventions suggest that it was "the conservationist pressure placed on metropolitan governments – along with gradual change in fashion – rather than colonial regulation that made the biggest difference to fate of these animals".[82]

It was thus cosmopolitan women who made the biggest difference to the *Paradisaea*. This is because although women were the ones wearing plumes, they were also some of the most prominent anti-plumage activists, founding the SPB and Audubon Societies and making up over ninety percent of their respective

memberships at their inception. Moreover, the first resolution calling for legislation in all countries to prevent the destruction of birds for millinery purposes, was carried at the Women's International Congress, in Rome, on May 9, 1914, on the motion of a Mrs. Creighton.[83] Men of the time were unsurprisingly quick to condemn female vanity as the root cause of the problem, however. For example, when the Plumage Bill failed to pass in the House of Commons in 1920, H. W. Massingham, writing under the nom de plume of "Wayfarer", made the following comments:

> What does one expect? They have to be shot in parenthood for child-bearing women to flaunt the symbols of it, and, as Mr Hudson says, one bird shot for its plumage means ten other deadly wounds and the starvation of the young. But what do women care? Look at Regent Street this morning! [84]

Although Massingham rightly points out how Western women's lust for lively apparel was threatening avian extinctions, in a reply essay entitled *The Plumage Bill* Virginia Woolf responds to Massingham's misogyny by pointing out that it was male hunters slaughtering the birds, male profiteers controlling the trade and a male parliament that failed to pass protection measures.[85] Woolf also prompts her audience to question the social code that "unconsciously condemns women's pleasures – their love of beauty– as sin whereas men's pleasures – their lusts for hunting, women, money – are accepted, even valorised".[86] I would go so far as to argue that this love of beauty was instrumental to the *Paradisaea's* eventual protection. Just as the birds-of-paradise had taught the likes of Mrs Astor and Mrs Mackay about the exceptional exuberance of their plumes it also taught women like Margaretta L. Lemon, Mrs Creighton and Virginia Woolf that this exuberance was worth valuing and protecting for its own sake and should be embodied by the birds alone. This underlines that even in their disembodied and dislocated commodity forms the *Paradisaea* retained an ability to

mobilize affections and relations, and that, from the outset, their liveliness constituted and made a difference to the world-making entanglements that both brought them to the brink of extinction and about a full ban on hunting in New Guinea in 1931.

Activating the Blue Bird-of-Paradise

This article has sought to emphasise the import of a biogeographical approach for telling the biographies of lively commodities, like that of the blue bird-of-paradise's. This is because such an approach accounted for the earth-life entanglements that mobilized and maintained the *Paradisaea* as lively commodities from New Guinea to New York. Moreover, by figuring the birds as active agents in their mobilizations across time and space and states of life and death, this article underlines the significant role so-called natural species and histories can play in shaping human histories. Revisiting the blue bird-of-paradise's current nesting place at NYV it is clear it is not only a "telling example" of the millions of *Paradisaea* that were mobilized as commodities but that its exceptional exuberance continues to seduce. For example, when Sarah Jessica Parker, who plays Carrie Bradshaw in *Sex and the City*, was asked in interview which piece of clothing from the six seasons and two movies of the franchise she would have liked to have kept, she replied:

> It's the bird. I wasn't allowed to keep the bird Carrie wore at the wedding that never happened. The blue beautiful bird. I can't get the bird. They won't give me the bird. The bird ... the bird has eluded me. [87]

The now iconic bird will continue to elude Parker as it remains in NYV's permanent archives and is available for rent only. Her desire to have the bird is, however,

reminiscent of the voracious feather lust so ridiculed by the cartoonists of *Punch* and *Puck* at the time of the plume boom (see Figure 5). And this may not have been lost on the costume designer for the *Sex and the City: The Movie*. The ill-fated Carrie and Big wedding marks the height of the character's materialistic hedonism. The jilted Carrie, in an excessive cream-puff Vivian Westwood gown and the blue bird-of-paradise headpiece, decries the lengths she has gone to attract her mate in this exchange with the character Miranda:

> **Carrie:** I put a bird on my head!
>
> **Miranda:** Is that what that was? I thought it was feathers.
>
> **Carrie:** It was a bird.

The blue bird thus becomes a mocking embodiment not only of the death of Carrie and Big's love (disregarding the inevitable fairy-tale reunion at the end of the movie) but, more importantly, her ridiculous materialistic excess. It also raises perplexing questions concerning my own position as modern-day plume-hunter. While I am not killing these birds like the Papuan, Malay, Dutch, Chinese and Australian hunters who sought fortunes by traveling into New Guinea rainforests at the height of the trade, I do find myself coveting their remains. And although it is now illegal to hunt or export birds-of-paradise, many bird-of-paradise species continue to be threatened through a black-market trade in their plumes and because their habitat is slowly being destroyed through New Guineas' contemporary exports in gold, copper, timber and coffee. If the latest reports prove accurate, many birds-of-paradise species are said to be on a "flight to oblivion", which is why to conclude it is worth reflecting on the telling hue of the blue bird-of-paradise.

Figure 5: Amid groundswell of feminist concern and activism, a rancorous and gender-biased debate raged in the popular press. Women were lambasted for their 'murderous vanity' and satirical magazines like Punch and Puck delighted in caricaturing "The Woman Behind the Gun". Illustration in Puck, 69/1786 (1911 May 24), centerfold.

Where the dyed-blue skin was mobilized in *Sex and the City: The Movie* to act as Carrie's *something blue*, I have mobilized the blue bird-of-paradise as a "telling example" of near-extinction. However, where blue is often connoted with despondency and depression, Vinciane Despret urges us that to mourn well in this time of mass extinction we must not be taken over by melancholia but rather bring the dead into active presence.[88] To do so, Thom Van Dooren argues scholars need to take a "particularly "lively" approach to telling stories about life and death in the shadow of extinction" by weaving "tales that add flesh to the bones of the dead and dying, that give them some vitality, presence, and perhaps "thickness" on the page and in the minds of readers".[89] This is what I have attempted to do for the *Paradisaea*, much like Wallace before me. Wallace's *The Malay Archipelago* is retrospectively understood as a "masterpiece of biogeography" for its vivid descriptions of not just flora and fauna but the island eco-systems of the Archipelago.[90] I would like to argue it could

also be understood as a forerunner to the type of biogeographical writing I have argued for in this essay due to Wallace's commitments to describing the entanglements between not just the bio and the geo but between nonhuman and human lifeworlds, including his own intimate entanglements with and sensory attachments to particular animal species and specimens, not least those of the birds-of-paradise. [91] By tracing the collective commodity biogeographies of the blue bird-of-paradise my aim in this article was to demonstrate how liveliness, via the biogeographic process of runaway sexual selection, mobilized the *Paradisaea* as commodities and almost brought about their extinction, but also enabled them to resist the complete deadening effects of commodification. And with the actual Blue Bird-of-Paradise (*Paradisaea rudolphi*) listed as "Vulnerable" due to habitat loss and continued plume-hunting,[92] telling the dyed-blue bird-of-paradise's transspecies social histories – what I have called biogeographies - is therefore a form of active remembrance and a way of working towards "multispecies recuperation and resurgence".[93] At its simplest then, a form of lively earth writing.

ENDNOTES:

[1] Arun Saldanha "Two Birds of Paradise in North Holland, 1592: The Gift in the Exotic," *Parallax* 16, no. 1 (2010): 68-79, 69.

[2] https://www.newyorkvintage.com, last accessed April 25, 2018.

[3] In Paris, the guild of the *plumassiers* got their charter in the sixteenth century, with the trade itself having been practiced in the city for at least three centuries prior to this, with the guild of the peacock-feather-hat-makers applying for a charter in the

thirteenth century. See Alfred Franklin, *Historical Dictionary of Arts, Crafts And Professions Practiced In Paris Since The Thirteenth Century* (Paris, 1906), 575.

[4] Marine Pacault and Merle Patchett "The Last Plumassier: Storying Dead Birds, Gender and Paraffection at Maison Lemarié," *Cultural Geographies* 25, no. 1 (2018): 123-134.

[5] Saldanha, "Two Birds," 69.

[6] Pamela Swadling, *Plumes from Paradise: Trade Cycles in Outer Southeast Asia and their Impact on New Guinea and Nearby Islands Until 1920* (Coorparoo, 1996).

[7] Gillian Whitlock, "Post-ing Lives," *Biography* 35, no. 1 (2012): v-xvi, vii.

[8] This aim is informed by a rethinking of what constitutes the "social" from work in 1) Science and Technology Studies (STS), particularly the following works of Bruno Latour: *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge MA, 1993), *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford, 2005), 2) Cultural Geography, particularly the following works by Sarah Whatmore: *Hybrid Geographies: Natures, Cultures, Spaces* (London, 2002), "Materialist Returns: Practicing Cultural Geography in and for a More-than-Human World', *Cultural Geographies* 13 (2006): 600-609; 3) Social Anthropology, particularly the following works of Tim Ingold: *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London, 2011), Tim Ingold, and Gisli Palsson (eds.) *Biosocial Becomings: Integrating Social and Biological Anthropology* (Cambridge, 2013); and 4) Feminist Multi-Species Studies, particularly the following works of Donna Haraway: *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis, 2008), *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham NC, 2016).

[9] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*.

[10] This definition draws its inspiration from the work of Whatmore and Haraway cited in note 8.

[11] The idea that commodities can be afforded a "life" or "career" originates in the following edited volume by Arjun Appadurai (ed), *Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge,1986).

[12] Samuel Day Fassbinder, "Telling Capitalist World-Ecology in the History of Commodities," *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 27, no. 1 (2016): 126-131.

[13] Gavin Bridge and Adrian Smith, "Intimate Encounters: Culture – Economy – Commodity," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 21 (2003): 257-268.

[14] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 45.

[15] See for example: Rosemary-Claire Collard and Jessica Dempsey, "Life For Sale? The Politics of Lively Commodities," *Environment and Planning A* 45 (2013): 2682-

2699; Mann Barua, "Nonhuman Labour, Encounter Value, Spectacular Accumulation: the Geographies of a Lively Commodity," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 42, no. 2 (2017): 274-288.

[16] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 45.

[17] Mann Barua, "Nonhuman labour"; Emily T. Yeh and Kunga T. Lama, "Following the Caterpillar Fungus: Nature, Commodity Chains, and the Place of Tibet in China's Uneven Geographies," *Social & Cultural Geography* 14, no. 3 (2013): 318-340; Annalisa Colombino and Paolo Giaccaria, "Dead Liveness/Living Deadness: Thresholds of Non-Human Life and Death in Biocapitalism," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 6 (2016): 1044–1062.

[18] Colombino and Giaccaria, "Dead Liveness," 1046.

[19] Due to their expense, and later because of wildlife preservation acts, plumassiers attempted to imitate the aesthetic characteristics of bird-of-paradise plumes using both unnatural materials and the feathers of common bird species. However, neither could compare to the real thing.

[20] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*; Nicole Shukin, *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times* (Minneapolis, 2009), 130.

[21] Garry Marvin, "Perpetuating Polar Bears: The Cultural Life of Dead Animals," in Bryndis Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson, *Nanoq: Flatout and Bluesome: A Cultural Life of Polar Bears*, (London, 2006), 157.

[22] See for example: Glen MacDonald, *Biogeography: Space, Time and Life* (London, 2001).

[23] Tom Spencer and Sarah Whatmore, "Bio-geographies: Putting Life Back into the Discipline," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 26, no. 2 (2001): 139-141, 140. See also Maan Barua, "Bio-Geo-Graphy: Landscape, Dwelling, and the Political Ecology of Human–Elephant Relations," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32 (2014): 915–934.

[24] For example, see Merle Patchett, Kate Foster and Hayden Lorimer, "The Biogeographies of a Hollow-Eyed Harrier," in Sam Alberti (ed) *The Afterlives of Animals: A Museum Menagerie* (Virginia, 2011), 110-133.

[25] For examples see: Chris Gosden, and Yvonne Marshall "The Cultural Biography of Objects", *World Archaeology*, 31 (1999): 169-178; Chris Gosden and Chantal Knowles, *Collecting Colonialism: Material Culture and Colonial Change* (Oxford, 2001); Sam Alberti "Objects and the Museum," *Isis* 96 (2005): 559-571.

[26] This definition draws its inspiration from the work of Whatmore and Haraway cited in note 8.

[27] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 42.

[28] e.g. Latour, *We Have Never*; *Reassembling the Social*.

[29] Sarah Whatmore, *Hybrid Geographies*, 3.

[30] Whatmore explores the intersection of the lives of commodities with "lived bodies" through such intimacies as eating, cultivating, and claiming ownership (patenting) of living species. See: "Bio-Geographies,*" Hybrid Geographies*, and "Materialist Returns" in notes 8 and 23.

[31] Lara Putnam, "To Study the Fragments/Whole: Microhistory And the Atlantic World," *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 3 (2006): 615-630, 618.

[32] Putnam, *The Fragments*, 618.

[33] The full seven species are: Lesser bird-of-paradise, *Paradisaea minor*, Greater bird-of-paradise, *Paradisaea apoda*; Raggiana bird-of-paradise, *Paradisaea raggiana*; Goldie's bird-of-paradise, *Paradisaea decora*; Red bird-of-paradise, *Paradisaea rubra*; Emperor bird-of-paradise, *Paradisaea guilielmi*; Blue bird-of-paradise, *Paradisaea rudolphi*.

[34] For elaborations see: Pamela Swadling, *Plumes from Paradise*; Robert Cribb, "Birds of Paradise and Environmental Politics in Colonial Indonesia, 1890-1931," in Peter Boomgaard, Freek Colombijn and David Henley (eds), *Paper Landscapes: Explorations in the Environmental History of Indonesia* (Leiden, 1997), 379-408; Corey Ross, *Ecology and Power in the Age of Empire: Europe and the Transformation of the Tropical World*, (Oxford, 2017).

[35] Stuart Kirsch, *Reverse Anthropology: Indigenous Analysis of Social and Environmental Relations in New Guinea* (Stanford, 2006).

[36] The region comprised the four independent countries of Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea, as well as the French special collectivity of New Caledonia, and the Indonesian region of Western New Guinea. Early European explorers named the region Melanesia – "islands of black" – in prejudicial reference to the skin colour of the islands' inhabitants.

[37] Pierre Belon, *L'histoire de la Natvre des Oyseavx, Avec Levrs Descriptions, & NaÏfs Portraicts Retirez du Naturel: Escrite en Sept Livres* (Paris, 1555).

[38] Ulisse Aldrovandi, *Ornithologiae hoc est de Avibus Historiae L*ibri *XII,* (Bologna, 1599).

[39] Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value", in Arjun Appadurai, (ed) The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective, (Cambridge,1986), 3–63.

[40] This is because those following this approach often, 1) forget the importance of spatial relations and contexts and treat the commodity "life" as a series of discreet phases and 2) draw on an impoverished understanding of "the social" as largely referring to and reflecting collective human experience and histories, and of the commodity as *man*-made and mobilized.

[41] Here again I draw on the work of Sarah Whatmore: "Bio-geographies," *Hybrid Geographies*, "Materialist Returns".

[42] Alfred R. Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago: The Land of the Orang-utang and the Bird of Paradise* (London, 1869).

[43] Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, 420.

[44] Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, 420.

[45] Alfred R. Wallace, "On the Great Bird of Paradise, *Paradisaea* apoda, Linn.; 'Burong mati' (Dead Bird) of the Malays; 'Fanéhan' of the natives of Aru," *Annals and Magazine of Natural History* 20, no. 120 (1857): 411-416, 411.

[46] Alfred R. Wallace, "On the Natural History of the Aru Islands," *Annals and Magazine of Natural History* 20 no. 121 (Supplement 1857): 473-485, 474.

[47] Abel Alves, "Humanity's Place in Nature, 1863 – 1928: Horror, Curiosity and the Expeditions of Huxley, Wallace, Blavatsky and Lovecraft, Theology and Science," 6 no. 1 (2008): 73-88, 85; Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, 455.

[48] Wallace, "On the Great Bird," 412.

[49] Martin Irestedt, Knud A Jønsson, Jon Fjeldså, Les Christidis and Per GP Ericson, "An Unexpectedly Long History of Sexual Selection in Birds-of-Paradise," *BMC Evolutionary Biology* 9 (2009): 235.

[50] Kirsch, *Reverse Anthropology*, 37.

[51] See, Leonard Y. Andaya "Flights of Fancy: the Bird of Paradise and its Cultural Impact," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 48, no. 3 (2017): 372-389.

[52] Holger Warnk "The Coming of Islam And Moluccan-Malay Culture to New Guinea C.1500–1920, Indonesia and the Malay World," 38, no. 110 (2010): 109-134, 111-2.

[53] Andaya, "Flights of Fancy," 387.

[54] Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, 438.

[55] Wallace, "On the Great Bird," 413-4.

[56] Wallace, "On the Great Bird," 411.

[57] Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, 422.

[58] Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, 407.

[59] Saldanha, "Two Birds," 69.

[60] Brian Massumi, *What Animals Teach us About Politics* (Durham 2014), 2.

[61] Saldanha, "Two Birds," 68.

[62] Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, 440.

[63] Wallace's suggestion that the Dutch officials had rerouted the tribute economy into a global colonial commodity chain has been corroborated by Kirsch, *Reverse Anthropology*, 34.

[64] Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, 438.

[65] Stewart Kirsch "History and the Birds of Paradise: Surprising Connections from New Guinea," *Expedition* 48 no. 1 (2006), 15-21, 19.

[66] Robin W. Doughty, *Feather Fashions and Bird Preservation: a Study in Nature Protection* (California, 1975), 22.

[67] Sarah Stein, *Plumes: Ostrich Feathers, Jews, and a Lost World of Global Commerce* (Yale, 2010).

[68] Corey Ross, *Ecology and Power*, 247.

[69] Kirsch, *Reverse Anthropology*, 37.

[70] Doughty, *Feather Fashions*, 22.

[71] William, T. Hornaday, *Our Vanishing Wildlife: Its Extermination and Preservation*, (New York, 1913), 125.

[72] Doughty, *Feather Fashions,* 26.

[73] Quoted in H. H. Johnston, "The Plumage Bill," *Nature* 92/2302 (December, 1913): 428-429, 429.

[74] Ross, *Ecology and Power*, 247.

[75] Cribb, "Birds of Paradise," 384.

[76] Cribb, "Birds of Paradise," 387; Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge, 1995).

[77] Margaretta L. Lemon, "The Bird of Paradise," *Nature* 52/197 (June 1895): 197.

[78] Cribb, "Birds of Paradise," 393-4.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Various, "Bird Notes and News," *Journal for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds* volume 1 (1914): 18.

[81] Cribb, "Birds of Paradise," 388.

[82] Ross, *Ecology and Power*, 248.

[83] Various, "Bird Notes," 27.

[84] Letter, 10 July 1920 by HW Massingham, writing as "Wayfarer".

[85] Virginia Woolf, "The Plumage Bill," *The Woman's Leader* 3 (July 23 1920): 241-45.

[86] Melba Cuddy-Keane, "The Rhetoric of Feminist Conversation: Virginia Woolf and the Trope of the Twist", in Kathy Mezei (ed) *Ambiguous Discourse: Feminist Narratology and British Women Writers* (Chapel Hill, 2000), 137-161, 149.

[87] Interview previously accessed at http://main.stylelist.com/2010/05/25/sarah-jessica-parker-bird-hat/ link now deleted.

[88] Vinciane Despret, *Au Bonheur des Morts: Récits de Ceux qui Restent* (Paris, 2015).

[89] Thom Van Dooren, *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction* (New York, 2014), 8.

[90] David Quammen "In Retrospect: The Malay Archipelago," *Nature* 496 (2013): 165–166.

[91] This said, it is worth noting that although Wallace demonstrated a more respectful curiosity in other human cultures than many of his contemporary evolutionists, he still used prejudicial language to describe the appearance and ways of life of the peoples he encountered and depended upon during his fieldwork and was thus not alive to present-day concerns with western privilege in a (post)colonial context: Mark Griffiths "From Heterogeneous Worlds: Western Privilege, Class and Positionality in the South," *Area* 49 no. 1 (2017): 2-8.

[92] Michiel Van den Bergh, Koen Kusters and A. J. (Ton) Dietz, "Destructive Attraction: Factors that Influence Hunting Pressure on the Blue Bird-of-Paradise Paradisaea rudolphi," *Bird Conservation International* 23 no. 2 (2013): 221-231.

[93] Haraway, *Staying With*, 8.